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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Thursday, January 2, 1936

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "HELP FOR THE HOME SEAMSTRESS." Information from the Extension Service and the Bureau of Home Economics, United States Department of Agriculture.

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Among my friends is a lady who tells me that she always sews with a sigh. She says that the very thought of patterns or cutting scissors gives her the fidgets, and the sound of the sewing machine does even worse. But she says she has to sew for her family just the same. And she says the reason that she feels dreary during the months of January and February is that during these months she catches up on her sewing jobs.

In case you feel like this friend of mine, maybe you'll be interested in the story I have to tell you today. It is about an extension worker who set out a few years ago to ask housewives about their job. She was especially interested in finding out what part of the housework women in her State disliked the most and why. She asked that question of hundreds of women on farms, in small towns and in cities. And a good many of them told her that the sewing they had to do for the family was the big bugbear in their lives. Well, then she set out to learn why. She finally came to the conclusion that a good deal of the trouble came from the wrong sewing arrangements -- inconvenient or uncomfortable arrangements.

For instance, one woman who complained bitterly about sewing kept her sewing machine in a dark corner of a hallway. The result was that she either had to sew out there in the hall where it was dark and cold, or she had to move the machine every time she wanted to do a little stitching. No wonder she didn't enjoy sewing. Most of her troubles were over when she found a permanent place for her machine in a room near a window where she had plenty of light by day, and where she also had a good lamp for evening work. As the machine was an old model and not particularly beautiful in appearance, she hid it along with other sewing equipment, behind a decorative screen.

This screen came to be useful as well as decorative. It was fixed up as a screen on one side and sewing kit on the other. The housekeeper attached pockets and slips to the back where she kept her tape, cards, buttons, hooks and eyes, needles and thread, scissors and even patterns. With all this small equipment assembled and within easy reach of her hand, with plenty of daylight coming in at the window, and a comfortable lamp for evening use, most of this woman's sewing troubles disappeared. In fact, she reported that dressmaking was no longer the unpleasant and dreaded task that it used to be. By the way, you can buy unpainted wooden screen frames very inexpensively these days.



Well, and here's another case. A woman who lived in a large rambling farmhouse reported that she had been sewing for herself and her family for twenty-five years and had hated every minute of it. When the specialist looked into sewing arrangements in that home, she found that this poor woman had to walk miles in order to make a simple dress. Sewing in that household was a run-around job -- upstairs and downstairs and all around the house. You see, there was only one ironing board and that was in the back kitchen. The sewing machine was way upstairs in the south bedroom. The only cutting table was the table in the dining room. The long mirror was way down at the end of an upstairs hall. As for small equipment like the sewing basket and the button box and the scissors -- well, that was scattered all over the house. You had to run hither and yon to find it.

Poor lighting was one of the big reasons for the "sewing complex" many of these women had. They didn't know why they felt so tired and strained and cross after sewing. But the specialist did when she saw the kind of light they were using. You know, lighting experts nowadays have very definite ideas about comfortable and efficient light for close work like sewing. They're saying a good deal about lighting that prevents both gloom and glare; and they're talking about balanced lighting and that comfortable diffused light that spreads over a room as daylight does outdoors.

If sewing gives you fidgets, maybe you better take a critical look at your lamps. You need a diffused or general light around the sewing room plus a brighter light thrown directly on your work. The lamp you use for close work needs to give five times the illumination of the general lighting of the room. And it needs to have a shade wide and deep enough to conceal the glare from the bulb. Also it should stand rather high to throw a fairly wide circle of light over your work. The specialists say that the lower edge of the lamp shade should be 18 or 20 inches from the work surface that your eyes concentrate on.

So much for assembling your equipment for convenience and comfort and having the right light for the job. Here's another situation that these women reported among their sewing troubles -- disappointing experiences trying to fit themselves alone at home and also in trying to hang their own dresses evenly. Well, clothing specialists all over the country have been helping groups of women make dress forms -- exact duplicates of their figures mounted to stand at exactly their heights. Making a dress form isn't the easiest job in the world. It requires time, care and two or three people to do the work together. But if you do a good deal of your own sewing, you'll find a model like this a great help. You can probably get free directions for making a dress form from your State college or extension service. You can also get dress-form directions by writing the Bureau of Home Economics at Washington, D. C.

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